

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 741
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE
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UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 948

E. O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PEPR IS EG US
SUBJ: ISRAELI REACTION TO SADAT'S ASSEMBLY SPEECH; VIEWS
OF NEXT STEPS

1. SUMMARY: ISRAELI REACTION TO SADAT'S JAN 20 SPEECH TO THE PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY IS ONE OF CAUTIOUS RELIEF, OR IRRITATION AT CRITICISM OF ISRAEL COMBINED WITH SATISFACTION THAT SADAT IS WILLING TO CONTINUE THE SEARCH FOR PEACE. THERE IS WIDESPREAD EXPECTATION THAT THE US WILL PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN PREVENTING A FURTHER DETERIORATION IN THE SITUATION AND THAT TODAY'S CABINET SESSION WILL PROBABLY AUTHORIZE CONTINUED PARTICIPATION IN THE MILITARY COMMITTEE TALKS. SOME EDITORIALISTS AND COMMENTATORS ATTEMPT TO PLACE THE BLAME FOR THE SETBACK AND SEE BOTH SIDES AT FAULT. IN GENERAL, THERE IS A FEELING THAT SADAT HAS BECOME TOUGHER. TWO PAPERS FOCUS ON SADAT'S EFFORT TO DRIVE A WEDGE BETWEEN ISRAELI CABINET MEMBERS. END SUMMARY

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2. ISRAELI PAPERS TODAY DISCUSS THE SADAT SPEECH AND SPECULATE ON HOW THE ISRAELI REACTION TO IT WILL AFFECT POLICY DECISIONS. AN AL HAMISHMAR EDITORIAL SAID "THE MOST IMPORTANT POINT IN SADAT'S SPEECH WAS THE EMPHASIS THAT THE PEACE INITIATIVE IS CONTINUING" AND NOTED SEVERAL ENCOURAGING POINTS: "APART FROM NOT MENTIONING THE PLO, THERE WAS ALSO A MORE MODERATE TONE REGARDING EAST JERUSALEM (WHICH

WAS NOT MENTIONED AT ALL) AND THE FUTURE OF THE WEST BANK AND THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM...." HAARETZ IS SOMEWHAT GLOOMIER AND CONCLUDES THAT SADAT CONTINUES TO ADHERE TO CONDITIONS WHICH ISRAEL CANNOT POSSIBLY ACCEPT. IT FEELS SADAT IS NOT PREPARED TO MAKE ANY CONCESSIONS AS REQUIRED "IN CLASSIC DIPLOMACY." SAFADI IN THE POST WRITES THAT "SADAT WENT OUT OF HIS WAY TO DEMONSTRATE BOTH CONFIDENCE AND STRENGTH, NOTING THAT EGYPT WAS NOT SEEKING PEACE AT ANY PRICE... IN EFFECT SADAT LEFT THE DOOR OPEN FOR EVERYTHING BUT A GENUINE RECONCILIATION WITH PREMIER BEGIN OR WITH THE LATTER'S BASIC POSITIONS." AN EDITORIAL IN THE SAME PAPER SAYS THAT "DESPITE ALL THE DIFFICULTIES AND DOUBTS, WHAT DOES EMERGE IS THAT SADAT HAS NOT SLAMMED THE DOOR ON FURTHER TALKS." HOWEVER, EDITORIALIZES THAT IF SADAT INSISTS THAT ISRAEL RETURN ALL THE "CONQUERED ARAB LANDS" THEN THERE WOULD NOT BE MUCH SENSE IN RESUMING THE NEGOTIATIONS.

3. THE ROLE OF THE US RECEIVES CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION BY COMMENTATORS AND EDITORIALISTS. BENZIMAN COMMENTS IN HAARETZ THAT IT IS THOUGHT IN JERUSALEM THAT SADAT'S SPEECH IS REGARDED AS "MODERATE" BY THE US AND THIS EVALUATION WILL BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION WHEN THE CABINET DISCUSSES THE ISSUE TODAY. BLOCH WRITES IN DAVAR THAT THE US WILL PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE IN TRYING TO BRING ABOUT THE RESUMPTION OF THE POLITICAL NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE SIDES. A HAARETZ UNCLASSIFIED

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EDITORIAL URGES THE AMERICAN LEADERSHIP TO CLARIFY TO SADAT THAT THE ROAD HE HAS CHOSEN IS LEADING TO A DEADLOCK; "ISRAEL REGRETS THIS.... BUT IT HAS NO POWER TO REMOVE THE OBSTACLES PLACED BY SADAT."

4. REGARDING THE MILITARY COMMITTEE DISCUSSIONS, BLOCH PREDICTS IN DAVAR THAT "THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE DEFENSE MINISTER WILL RECOMMEND TO CONTINUE THE TALKS IN THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN THE FRAMEWORK OF A DIRECT DIALOG WITH EGYPT..." HARIF SAYS IN MAARIV THAT THE TENDENCY IN JERUSALEM REGARDING THE CONTINUATION OF THE MILITARY COMMITTEE TALKS IS GENERALLY POSITIVE BUT NAKDIMON AND ZIMUKI WRITE IN YEDIOT AHARONOT THAT WHILE THE CABINET MAY DECIDE TO AGREE TO THE RESUMPTION OF THE TALKS, IT MAY CALL FOR A CHANGE IN THEIR LOCATION OR NATURE. SEVERAL WRITERS STRESS ALSO THAT IF THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE TALKS RESUME, THEIR FORMAT AND PERHAPS THEIR LOCATION WILL BE DIFFERENT. HARIF SAYS THAT AT THIS STAGE NOTHING DEFINITE HAS BEEN DECIDED ON HOW TO CONTINUE THE TALKS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE, BUT IT IS NOW CLEAR THAT THAT FRAMEWORK WILL NOT BE SIMILAR TO THE HILTON TALKS.

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UCK LOCAL OBSERVERS ALSO SEARCH IN THE SPEECH FOR INDICATIONS OF WHAT WENT WRONG. BLOCH SPECULATES THAT THE TWO REASONS WHICH CAUSED SADAT TO SUSPEND THE TALKS WERE ISRAEL'S BEHAVIOUR ON THE RAFAH SETTLEMENTS ISSUE AND BEGIN'S PUBLIC STATEMENTS. HE WROTE "SADAT'S REMARKS CONFIRM THE EVALUATION THAT DURING THE FIRST STAGE OF THE TALKS HE DID NOT OPPOSE THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF THE ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS IN THE SINAI ... BUT HE CHANGED HIS MIND WHEN IT BECAME CLEAR THAT ISRAEL INTENDED TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF SETTLEMENTS...." BLOCH ADDS THAT BEGIN'S REMARKS AT THE DINNER ON TUESDAY WERE CRITICIZED BY SEVERAL MKS. BENZIMAN ADDS TO THIS THAT WHEN THE PRIME MINISTER APPEARED BEFORE THE KNESSET FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SECURITY COMMITTEE ON FRIDAY, "HE BITTERLY CRITICIZED ALIGNMENT MKS FOR SHOWING LACK OF NATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY IN CONNECTING HIS SPEECH WITH SADAT'S DECISION TO SUSPEND THE TALKS..." AL HAMISHMAR BLAMES BOTH SIDES FOR THE RECENT DETERIORATION IN RELATIONS. "ISRAEL ADOPTED A STRANGE (TO USE A RESTRAINED EXPRESSION) POSITION" ON THE RAFAH SETTLEMENTS ISSUE. IT GOES ON TO STATE THAT THE

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GOI MUST NOT ALLOW "SECONDARY ISSUES IN THE SINAI" TO JEOPARDIZE THE UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY OF MAKING PEACE BUT STRESSED THAT SADAT, FOR HIS PART, MUST NOT PRESENT ULTIMATUMS. THE POST SAYS THAT WHILE SADAT'S REASONS FOR BREAKING OFF TALKS ARE NOT CLEAR, "HIS CRITICISM ABOUT ISRAEL'S HANDLING OF THE TALKS AND SOME OF THE PUBLIC STATEMENTS MADE HERE, SHOULD HOWEVER ALSO LEAD TO SOME SELF-REVIEW IN JERUSALEM. FOR CERTAINLY SADAT APPEARED TO HAVE EVERY RIGHT TO WONDER ABOUT ISRAEL'S INTENTIONS WHEN BULLDOZERS IN SINAI, REplete WITH FANFARE, SUDDENLY MATERIALIZED WHILE HE WAS SUPPOSEDLY GAINING AGREEMENT ABOUT ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL, AND WHEN ISRAELI RHETORIC COUNTERED A COMMITMENT TO DESIST FROM POLEMICS."

6. IN GENERAL, OBSERVERS HERE BELIEVE THAT SADAT HAS HARDENED HIS POSITION. BLOCH WRITES THAT JERUSALEM ESTIMATES THAT THE PRESENT EGYPTIAN POSITION AMOUNTS TO A TOTAL REJECTION OF THE ISRAELI PEACE PLAN. THE POST EDITORIAL LEADS OFF: "WHATEVER MAY HAVE BEEN PRESIDENT SADAT'S INTENTION WHEN HE VISITED JERUSALEM TWO MONTHS AGO, HE NOW APPEARS TO HAVE SETTLED INTO A HARDER LINE THAT WILL NOT MAKE THE PEACE PROCESS EASIER." THIS THOUGHT IS ECHOED BY OPPOSITION LEADER PERES WHO SAID "SADAT USED HARSH LANGUAGE AND, THEREFORE, THE STARTING POINT OF THE NEGOTIATIONS WILL NOW BE HARDER THAN THE PREVIOUS ONE."

7. NAKDIMON AND ZIMUKI WRITE IN YEDIOT THAT "THE IMPRESSION WAS CREATED IN JERUSALEM.... THAT SADAT WANTS TO CAUSE A RIFT BETWEEN SENIOR ELEMENTS IN THE GOVERNMENT OF ISRAEL ... BETWEEN BEGIN, WEIZMAN AND DAYAN ON THE ONE HAND AND 'OPPOSITION' MINISTERS ON THE OTHER." A MAARIV EDITORIAL PREDICTS THIS WILL FAIL; IT SAYS THAT SADAT, WHO "FAILS TO UNDERSTAND THE MECHANISM OF A DEMOCRATIC REGIME," IS BOUND TO FAIL IN HIS ATTEMPT. LEWIS
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